

Brethren Evangelist

"I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life."—Jesus

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Editorial

The Dying Century

The closing century is chiefly distinguished for its unexampled record in all the lines of material progress. Take whatever field, of science, of invention, development of soil and mine, discovery and domestication of new natural forces, creation of vast wealth, multiplication of material comforts, and the closing century will show more progress than was achieved before in the whole extended history of mankind. This is a marvelous fact, and furnishes the ground for unlimited boasting upon the part of those who think that material progress is the main thing, and also of some very earnest philosophical speculation upon the part of those who try to discover the secret psychological forces which govern the springs of human action. What is the meaning of all this merely physical advancement of the last century, and what relation does it bear to human progress? What are its spiritual lessons?

The century began with the political emancipation of the western world. Liberty whose sun had just risen in America, was but dawning upon the oppressed people of Europe. The shackles of long ages were being struck from the human mind, and it was doubtless this new freedom of mind which gave the first impulse to all that wonderful development that followed, illustrating the decades of the closing century with panoramic splendor. For thousands of years men had lived in various degrees of oppressive bondage, in want and discomfort, in fear and uncertainty, without incentive, and almost without hope. Suddenly a new era arises, the era of liberty. This new genius of the modern world fixed her high seat in a continent which was not exposed to the upheavals of the old world, its wars and revolutions, and where in consequence it was possible to secure the maximum of social order and political security. For the first time in human history men could build with a reasonable prospect of inhabiting, and could plant with the certainty of eating of their own vine. Under the protective aegis of Liberty, the first impulse of the human mind has been to secure the utmost possible possession of physical comfort and temporal luxury. To this end tribute has been laid upon all

the forces and all the resources of nature, until it almost seems that we have exhausted the marvelous treasures which were so long hidden in her capacious bosom.

The unexampled material progress of the century carries spiritual lessons, but we can not say that progress along the higher lines of human interest has been so marked or so triumphant. In literature the century displays a galaxy of brilliant stars, but no such luminaries as those which gilded the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with peculiar splendor. In religion no great prophet has arisen, no mighty reformer. A comparatively small fraction of the century's material wealth has been consecrated to missionary effort, and in consequence we are able to point to a distinctly new revival of apostolic zeal for the evangelization of heathen races. The century closes with another book of martyrs, and China in these last days furnishes her contribution to that numerous host which "came up thru great tribulation, having their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb." A world-wide missionary work is the saving feature of our end-of-century Church, yet the best evidence of the perseverance of the Christ spirit is not to be found, we regret to say, in the home churches, but among the new converts in the dark places of heathendom. In her testimony for righteousness; in her proclamation of the future life with its sublime destiny, with all its restraining influence upon the evils and passions of our human nature, with its tremendous incentive to self-denial, to purity of life, to spiritual and benevolent effort; in her saving influence in the midst of the nations, the Church, in spite of her many defects, in spite of the world-dimness which rests upon her vision, and the earth-stains which defile her garments, is still "the salt of the earth and the light of the world." More than ever before and fiercer than ever before, the battle is on between the material and the spiritual. The former is making the world beautiful and comfortable, the ne plus ultra of human aspiration. The latter is pointing with increasing earnestness and yet with increasing difficulty to that higher destiny which will bloom in the heavens with indescribable glory when the ruins of all the materialism and material worlds shall have passed from the memory of the mightiest archangel.